

**This guide is to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God’s Word. There may be questions you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience not to complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid teaching task list.**

## ***Connect...***

Option 1: Take a few moments to poll your small group. How many of them before now have ever done a study of The Song of Solomon? How many have attended a conference based on this book of the Bible? How many have thought of it as an unimportant book of the Bible in comparison to other books? How many have questioned why it is even in the Bible? How many at some point in the past have learned something about the book that made them think of it as more important than other books?

Option 2: How important is it in our day and age to have God’s perspective on sexuality? Why is it so important to know what God’s says about sex? Before you were a Christian, who or what most shaped your view of sex and sexuality (music, T.V. books, magazines, friends, parents, etc.)

## ***Study the Text . . .***

### ***Approaching the text***

The questions of why The Song of Solomon is in the Bible and why we should study it are one in the same. When we come to study The Song of Solomon we see a very different presentation than we are used to in our studies of Scripture. It seems risqué because of its stark contrast in form, but when considered for its message, it is not in contrast but in harmony with the truths and teachings found elsewhere in the canon of Scripture.

Besides its form, the content of this book sometimes leads its reader to wonder if they should even be reading it. This was the case for many in the time it was written because of the abundance of sexual promiscuity and the prominence of sensual and sexual abuses in the worship of pagan gods. The situation is very similar in our world today. Nakedness in God’s story leads to shame (Genesis 3), but the culture we live in unashamedly flaunts sexuality through every form of media available.

The cultures of the world around Israel in the Old Testament and around the church today have, by their misuse of human sexuality, greatly affected the mindset of God’s people. In an effort to avoid the church’s adoption of the view the world holds about the subject, they tend to avoid the subject altogether. If the subject has not been treated as taboo it may have been discussed, but primarily in ways that treat it as appalling or as a temptation to be avoided.

We have this book of the Bible because God saw fit to remind his people that He is the Creator God. Our bodies and souls are fashioned by His design. God is reminding us that

He created man to be in relationship with woman (monogamy), and in relationship with Him. God created man and woman, and the union of the two, to be good. This book gives a wholesome and God-glorifying perspective on human sexuality and its place inside marriage.

### ***Reading the Text***

The text seems to present itself most clearly as a unified narrative poem focused around a man and woman as they dialogue. The reader witnesses a great deal of their relationship as they become attracted to one another, prepare for marriage, guard their purity, consummate the marriage, deal with misunderstanding, find restoration, reaffirm commitment, repeat mutual praise and continue in infatuation with and enjoyment of each other. Today's reader may struggle with the abstract images used for description because it comes from a culture that is chronologically and geographically different, but the model given in this poem can impart timeless wisdom to be applied in relationships today.

#### *Some examples:*

- In much of the first three chapters these lovers share their desire for each other. They communicate their love so each knows how the other feels. The beloved even corrects his bride in 2:1-2 as she considers that he sees her as a flower among many others in the valley, but he is clear that she is the only flower. All others compare as thorns. *Praising and edifying your spouse is healthy for the relationship and a proper enjoyment of God's design.*
- The repeated refrain in 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4 reminds the reader that the longing for intimacy must be restrained until it is found inside marriage. The repetition of this need for restraint highlights the difference between God's design and the practice of the worldly. *Valuing God's design for sexual intimacy will lead to respecting marriage and the boundary it should be found in.*

There is such a rich wealth of wisdom in the example given us in this pristine model of love and marriage. However, the central idea of the text is evident regardless of how deep the reader goes in understanding. The longing for ones beloved is good, and the intimacy it leads to has its place inside the context of marriage where those romantic feelings are even more meaningful than when they were first felt. These feelings are not the whole (as the world may assume), but a very important part of the entire relationship between man and woman as God designed it.

### ***Comparing the Text***

The primary function of this poem, The Song of Solomon, is to put before God's people an example of love and intimacy as it was designed to be by the Creator of all things. The content of this book reminds the reader of the creation story. The companionship and the coming together of the man and the woman were first seen in Genesis 1 and 2. Not only that, but the imagery of fruits and flowers, and the language of life and the garden remind

the reader of the truth that God did create all things good and that human sexuality was a central part of that story.

The presence of The Song of Solomon in Scripture reminds the reader of the beginnings of sex, and reclaims it as a good and wholesome by sharing its true design and function in the context of marriage. The picture of pure and devoted love seen in the marriage of this book should be greatly valued by all people, past and present, young and old, married and single. It is vastly important for all in the church to have a good understanding of marriage and sexuality. Many have their own perspective on these topics. It may come from personal experience, watching parents or friends, and even from the world around them. Knowing what God intends, however, is what is necessary to understand what is meant when Christ and the church are compared to the bridegroom and his bride (Ephesians 5:22-33). Imagine the difficulty in accepting this comparison if ones perspective of marriage was limited to what they observed in the world. This book functions to help guard not only our perception of the way God designed husband and wife to relate, but the way He designed us to relate to Him. God is passionate in pursuit of his people, He showers them with love and mercy, and He desires their complete union to Him and will not share them with other “gods”.

***Discuss***

- Some examples of wisdom that can be found in this book were shared above. In your study of this book, what are some other thoughts of wisdom that you have identified?
- How can you model showing affection in a biblical way to your wife, your family and your friends?
- If married, do you think about your marriage as an example to those around you (in the church and the world) of the relationship between Christ and the church? If not married, can you identify examples around you that model this loving relationship?
- In what ways does The Song of Solomon enrich your understanding of Christ and His love for the church?
- How should the church look different from the world in its approach to sexuality?
- If you are married, discuss how you can incorporate The Song of Solomon in your marriage?
- Do you think God’s view of sex is more satisfying and pleasurable than the view of the world? Explain and defend your answer.
- How can parents use this book to teach their children and teenagers about sex? What truths do you think are most important to point out to them?
- How should this book affect the way you see Christ’s love for you (the church), and in response the way you love Him?
- Do you need to work to change your outlook toward intimacy?
  - Should you value it more highly?
  - If single, do you reserve it for its proper context?
  - If married, do you enjoy it to the fullest?
  - As a member of the church do you consider the possible depth of the relationship to be enjoyed with your Creator? Do you pursue God and shower Him with love in response to His love for you?